1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES	
2	x	
3	LEEGIN CREATIVE LEATHER :	
4	PRODUCTS, INC., :	
5	Petitioner :	
6	v. : No. 06-480	
7	PSKS, INC., DBA KAY'S :	
8	KLOSETKAY'S SHOES. :	
9	x	
10	Washington, D.C.	
11	Monday, March 26, 2007	
12	The above-entitled matter came on for ora	ı1
13	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States	
14	at 10:03 a.m.	
15	APPEARANCES:	
16	THEODORE B. OLSON, ESQ., Washington, D.C.; on behalf of	=
17	Petitioner.	
18	THOMAS G. HUNGAR, Deputy Solicitor General, Department	
19	of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf of United	
20	States, as amicus curiae, supporting Petitioner.	
21	ROBERT W. COYKENDALL, ESQ.; Wichita, Kan; on behalf of	
22	Respondent.	
23	BARBARA D. UNDERWOOD, ESQ., Solicitor General, New York	ς,
24	N.Y.; on behalf of New York, et al., as amicus	
25	curiae supporting Respondent	

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:03 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear argument
4	first this morning in case 06-480, Leegin Creative
5	Leather Products versus PSKS Incorporated. Mr. Olson.
6	ORAL ARGUMENT OF THEODORE B. OLSON
7	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
8	MR. OLSON: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
9	please the Court:
10	The per se illegality rule for resale price
11	maintenance is widely recognized to be outdated,
12	misguided and anticompetitive. It should be replaced
13	with the same rule of reason standard that applies to
14	other forms of vertically imposed marketing
15	restrictions.
16	The Sherman Act bars only unreasonable
17	restraints of trade and the court presumptively applies
18	a rule of reason analysis to determine whether a
19	restraint is unreasonable.
20	Per se rules should be rare and imposed only
21	where the court is virtually certain, based upon
22	considerable economic experience, that a practice is
23	nearly invariably anticompetitive. Vertical minimum
24	retail resale price maintenance are plainly not
25	invariably anticompetitive. In fact, a broad consensus

- 1 of economists and decisions of this Court recognize that
- 2 vertical restraints promote interbrand competition,
- 3 which is the goal of the antitrust laws and are rarely,
- 4 if ever, anticompetitive.
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: There was an argument
- 6 made, Mr. Olson, that it is somewhat difficult to
- 7 distinguish vertical from horizontal in this context,
- 8 that in fact, the agreement that the manufacturer made
- 9 with the dealers was more successful in getting a
- 10 horizontal accord among the dealers than if the dealers
- 11 had attempted it themselves, in which case some might
- 12 have held back.
- MR. OLSON: Well, the economists who have
- 14 looked at the use of resale price maintenance have said
- 15 that that would very rarely, if ever, be the case. It
- 16 certainly could not be the case in this industry in
- 17 connection with this participant in the marketplace.
- 18 There are something like 5,000 dealers that the Brighton
- 19 products are sold through. There are thousands and
- 20 thousands of other competing dealers, hundreds of
- 21 products.
- 22 What the Court has said repeatedly is that
- 23 programs such as this may promote interbrand
- 24 competition, perhaps --
- 25 JUSTICE STEVENS: Mr. Olson, suppose just

- 1 the dealers in New York, the retail dealers agreed among
- 2 themselves on the price. Would that be lawful?
- 3 MR. OLSON: No. I think that that would be
- 4 covered by a horizontal prohibition, Justice Stevens.
- 5 JUSTICE STEVENS: Would you say that it's
- 6 per se unlawful?
- 7 MR. OLSON: I think it would be, as
- 8 horizontal restraint among competing dealers, it could
- 9 be a per se violation under horizontal rules if it was
- 10 -- if it was -- involved the manufacturer in some way,
- 11 it could be dealt with by the rule of reason.
- JUSTICE STEVENS: Why should that be any
- 13 different from the arrangement where those dealers all
- 14 got together in a convention and recommended to the
- 15 manufacturer that he impose a vertical restraint of
- 16 precisely the same dimensions? Why should you
- 17 distinguish --
- 18 MR. OLSON: What this Court said in
- 19 Sylvania, and said again in the State Oil versus Khan,
- 20 is that the manufacturer has very, very little incentive
- 21 to increase --
- 22 JUSTICE STEVENS: No, but I'm asking what if
- 23 he did, why should you draw a distinction?
- 24 MR. OLSON: Because the motivation for the
- 25 arrangement, if it comes from a manufacturer -- you're

- 1 suggesting a hypothetical in which all of the dealers in
- 2 a particular area would get together to impose this on a
- 3 manufacturer. I think it's very unrealistic that that
- 4 would happen.
- 5 JUSTICE STEVENS: No. They just passed a
- 6 resolution asking the manufacturer to impose this
- 7 vertical restraint and he agrees to do it. Should that
- 8 be different from one in which the manufacturer does it
- 9 independently?
- 10 MR. OLSON: I think that if the manufacturer
- 11 makes a decision, whether it's because dealers would
- 12 like to see that happen or not, as this Court said in
- 13 Business Electronic versus Sharp Electronics, there's of
- 14 course relationships between the dealers and the
- 15 manufacturers, that the dealers may have an interest in
- 16 doing this, because they may find for the same reason
- 17 that the manufacturer does that it promotes the sales of
- 18 products. The record is clear in this case that this
- 19 was an effective strategy for the Brighton company, the
- 20 Brighton Leegin company that's manufacturing the
- 21 Brighton products, to enter a very difficult and highly
- 22 competitive marketplace, and it was successful.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Maybe, Mr. Olson,
- 24 you could give us an example where the rule of reason
- 25 would find a violation in this situation?

1	MR. OLSON: Well, it might be a situation
2	the economists have written about this, say that it
3	would be very rare, and would require retailers with a
4	strong powerful market power to impose a situation
5	where the manufacturer would do that to help facilitate
6	a horizontal cartel. That certainly was not involved in
7	this case, and that would probably be found to violate
8	the rule of reason. In addition, it would probably be
9	unlawful under the horizontal rules established by this
10	Court. That was not an issue in this case. The
11	economists say that that would very seldom happen.
12	JUSTICE BREYER: I'm interested you say
13	"very." Which economists? I know the Chicago school
14	tends to want rule of reason and so forth. Professor
15	Sherer is an economist, isn't he? Worked at the FTC for
16	quite a long time. Pretty good expert in his field.
17	He points out that the drug industry after you got rid
18	of after you got rid of resale price maintenance, the
19	margins fell 40 percent. The drug stores it went down 20
20	percent. He says with blue jeans, alone, it saved
21	American consumers \$200 million to get rid of it. And
22	his conclusion is, as in the uniform enforcement of
23	resale price maintenance, the restraints can impose
24	massive anti-consumer benefits. Massive.
25	MR. OLSON: Well

1 JUSTICE BREYER:	What that sounds like i	is
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- 2 that if at least he, who is an economist, thinks if you
- 3 get rid of Dr. Miles, every American will pay far more
- 4 for the goods that they buy at retail. Now that's one
- 5 economist, of course. There are others who think
- 6 differently. So how should we decide this?
- 7 MR. OLSON: Well --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: Should we overturn
- 9 Dr. Miles and run that risk?
- 10 MR. OLSON: In, in the vast majority of the
- 11 economists who have looked at this have come out to the
- 12 opposite conclusion, Justice Breyer. Secondly --
- JUSTICE BREYER: We're supposed to count
- 14 economists?
- MR. OLSON: No. No. I think that --
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: Is that how we decide it?
- 17 (Laughter.)
- 18 MR. OLSON: But what this Court -- what this
- 19 Court has repeatedly said, that under circumstances such
- 20 as this where there is a consensus among leading
- 21 respected economists, that is one factor. There's
- 22 another factor --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Well, I haven't seen a
- 24 consensus. A consensus? Isn't, doesn't Sherer and all
- 25 these people, doesn't that point of view count, too?

1	MR.	OLSON:	This	is	one	factor	that	the

- 2 Court should consider and the Court has considered in
- 3 the past when dealing with something that the Court
- 4 itself has said, is an anachronistic and chronologically
- 5 schizoid rule, to have a rule of reason for certain
- 6 vertical restraints and a fixed, rigid, per se rule with
- 7 respect to other vertical restraints. The Court -- the
- 8 Court itself has made those pronouncements.
- 9 The enforcing agencies have changed their
- 10 view with respect -- and they are here today, the
- 11 Antitrust Division and the Federal Trade Commission, all
- 12 of whom have announced that they believe that it is very
- 13 rare for a rule such as this, for an arrangement such as
- 14 this to be anticompetitive.
- 15 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But it was not so long
- 16 ago that the Department of Justice took a different
- 17 view. And of all of the vertical restraints, this is
- 18 the only one where Congress has been a player. I mean,
- 19 Congress allowed the fair trade laws to operate. And
- 20 then it withdrew that. There's no other restraint where
- 21 there has been congressional action, where the
- 22 argument could be made, well, Congress is well aware of
- 23 this, the Court should allow them to make a change, if
- 24 they so will.
- MR. OLSON: Essentially, the same argument

- 1 was made in the Sylvania -- at the time of the Sylvania
- 2 case. The same argument was made just a term or two ago
- 3 in connection with the Illinois Tool case that dealt
- 4 with tying arrangements. The same argument was made in
- 5 State Oil versus Khan. This Court has construed the
- 6 antitrust laws as an expression by Congress that the
- 7 courts should be aware of the dynamic potential in the
- 8 marketplace --
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But in those cases you
- 10 didn't have the counterpart to Miller-Tydings and
- 11 McGuire. That's what makes this -- this one different
- in terms of congressional attention.
- 13 MR. OLSON: The repeal of those statutes,
- 14 Justice Ginsburg, repealed per se legality rules. It
- 15 was not a congressional expression against the rule of
- 16 reason --
- 17 JUSTICE STEVENS: No, but there was in the
- 18 patent case, though, Mr. Olson. We relied on the fact
- 19 that the patent law changed.
- 20 MR. OLSON: Yes, you did.
- JUSTICE STEVENS: Yes.
- MR. OLSON: And that was a, that was one
- 23 factor, however, Justice Stevens. I think, as I read
- 24 that opinion, the Court was also concerned with the fact
- 25 that the, the per se rule which -- and the Court said

- 1 the same thing just a few weeks ago in the
- 2 Weyerhaeuser case -- to the extent that there's
- 3 practices that can be procompetitive, the Court should
- 4 not set a low threshold of illegality, especially low
- 5 per se illegality threshold. There were -- there have
- 6 been -- it is worth emphasizing that the Court has
- 7 repeatedly said we don't want per se rules when we
- 8 don't have a substantial body of economic experience
- 9 that shows us that this practice --
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What about -- what
- 11 about the reliance interest, though? I mean, hasn't a
- 12 whole industry of discount stores developed in reliance
- on the Dr. Miles rule? And don't we need to be
- 14 concerned about the disruption to that established
- 15 practice?
- 16 MR. OLSON: There's really no evidence that
- 17 the marketplace as it exists today is a result of the
- 18 Dr. Miles rule of 1911, Chief Justice --
- 19 JUSTICE SOUTER: Isn't there evidence that
- 20 the, basically that the rise of the Wal-Marts and the
- 21 Targets is correlated with the demise of fair trade?
- 22 So that -- there's that correlation.
- MR. OLSON: Actually I looked into that,
- 24 Justice Souter. And my, my limited historical research
- 25 is that the -- those discounters were coming on strong

- 1 before 1975 which is when the, the Consumer Price --
- 2 whatever it was -- Act was passed in response to that.
- 3 There are -- the evidence basically shows
- 4 that -- and this Court has said -- that it's interbrand
- 5 competition that ultimately produces lower prices.
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, I don't know. We
- 7 have -- you talk about evidence -- just for fun I got
- 8 out of the library a book by Professor B. S. Yamey,
- 9 called Resale Price Maintenance, where he has five
- 10 economists -- now maybe you're not going to count them
- 11 as economists. Now I didn't find in that book a single
- 12 argument that isn't also in your briefs, nor did I find
- in your brief as single argument that isn't in the book.
- 14 There's one interesting thing about the
- 15 book. It was written in 1966. So I guess my question
- 16 is what's changed? Now I know two things have changed.
- 17 One is there's evidence in Canada, Britain,
- 18 and in the States that were under Miller-Tydings, that
- 19 when you got rid of resale price maintenance, prices
- 20 went down. That's changed. And the second thing that's
- 21 changed is there's far more concentration, I gather,
- 22 today in the retail side of the market than there
- 23 used to be, a factor which makes resale price
- 24 maintenance dangerous because it's more likely to take
- 25 place at the request of the dealers.

1	Now, I see those two changes. My question
2	to you is looking at Yamey's book which is called Resale
3	Price Maintenance, so you might have found even it even
4	on Google, and what's changed? What's new?
5	MR. OLSON: Well, a number of things have
6	changed. The the number of respected individuals,
7	notwithstanding that book, who have looked at it and
8	have focused on the marketplace, have said that because
9	it allows it increases the possibility of interbrand
10	competition, it can provide incentives for dealers to
11	provide service, differences in the products. And other
12	things that have happened since then, are this Court's
13	decision in the Sylvania case, which which involved
14	an elaborate analysis of vertical restrictions and found
15	that they are largely procompetitive and undermine the
16	ruling the reason for a per se rule.
17	This Court's decision in State Oil versus
18	Khan, and the other cases that this Court is very well
19	aware of where per se rules have systematically been
20	dismantled because they are artificial themselves in the
21	marketplace. This
22	JUSTICE SCALIA: Mr. Olson
23	JUSTICE KENNEDY: Does brand competition
24	generally help retailers, or is this a question that

25

can't be answered?

1	MR. OLSON: Did you say inter
2	JUSTICE KENNEDY: Interbrand, interbrand
3	competition? Do retailers like interbrand competition?
4	MR. OLSON: Well, I don't know that I
5	don't know whether people like competition. But the
6	antitrust laws like competition and this Court likes
7	competition. And this Court has said that interbrand
8	JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, but we're talking
9	about inter we're talking about retailers. It, it
10	seems to me at the outset of the argument, you you
11	acknowledged, and I think it is the general rule that
12	if the retailers themselves have this retail price
13	maintenance, it is invalid. Well, if the manufacturer
14	does this just for the convenience of the retailers, and
15	that's many of the examples in your brief, it is for
16	the convenience and for the benefit of the retailers,
17	then why shouldn't there be a per se rule? Why should
18	we allow the manufacturer to do something that we
19	wouldn't allow the retailers to do, if it's for the
20	retailers?
21	MR. OLSON: Well, the manufacturer is very
22	unlikely to do this for the convenience of the
23	retailers, to because it's in the interest of the
24	manufacturer to have the retail price as low as possible
25	so that the manufacturer will sell as many of the

- 1 manufacturer's products as possible.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: If -- if, if indeed that's,
- 3 that's what he's aiming at, low price. Is it the object
- 4 of the -- is the sole object of the Sherman Act to
- 5 produce low prices?
- 6 MR. OLSON: No.
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: I thought it was consumer
- 8 welfare.
- 9 MR. OLSON: Yes, yes, it is.
- 10 JUSTICE SCALIA: And I thought some
- 11 consumers would prefer more service at a higher price.
- MR. OLSON: Precisely.
- 13 JUSTICE SCALIA: So the mere fact that it
- 14 would increase prices doesn't prove anything. It
- 15 doesn't prove that it's serving consumer welfare. If,
- 16 in fact, it's giving the consumer a choice of more
- 17 service at a somewhat higher price, that would enhance
- 18 consumer welfare, so long as there are competitive
- 19 products at a lower price, wouldn't it?
- 20 MR. OLSON: That's -- that's absolutely
- 21 correct.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: So I don't know why, why we
- 23 should have to focus our entire attention on whether
- 24 it's going to -- going to produce higher prices or not.
- 25 The market out there has different goods at different

- 1 prices which have different qualities that attract
- 2 different consumers.
- 3 MR. OLSON: I -- I agree completely. I
- 4 would like to reserve the balance of my time for
- 5 rebuttal, but let me say that that's what this Court has
- 6 said over and over again. If you -- the purpose of the
- 7 antitrust laws is not price, but it's competition,
- 8 because competition between competing manufacturers give
- 9 the consumers more choice. Some people may want the
- 10 cheapest product. Some people may want the product
- 11 that's more available to them. They may wish the return
- 12 policy or the warranty policy or the repair policy that
- 13 the dealer provides. And in this marketplace
- 14 particularly, that system of providing competition is
- 15 consistent with the antitrust laws and has produced
- 16 success in the marketplace.
- 17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Olson, before you sit
- 18 down, there's just one thing that wasn't covered in your
- 19 argument or in the brief, but the complaint alleged in
- 20 this case that Leegin allowed certain favored dealers to
- 21 discount; not this plaintiff, but others were allowed to
- 22 discount. And if that was true, as a matter of fact,
- 23 then that would be a -- a plain violation of antitrust
- law, wouldn't it?
- 25 MR. OLSON: This -- but the case was never

- 1 litigated on that basis. It wasn't considered on that
- 2 basis in the court of appeals. It came up sort of as a
- 3 late thought in the opposition to the petition for
- 4 certiorari. But that is not this case. The case was
- 5 litigated on the per se rule of Dr. Miles.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 7 Mr. Olson.
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: It is in the complaint.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 10 Mr. Olson.
- 11 Mr. Hungar.
- 12 ORAL ARGUMENT OF THOMAS G. HUNGAR
- ON BEHALF OF UNITED STATES,
- 14 AS AMICUS CURIAE SUPPORTING PETITIONER
- 15 MR. HUNGAR: Thank you Mr. Chief Justice,
- 16 and may it please the Court.
- 17 The same considerations that led this Court
- 18 in Sylvania and State Oil to reject outmoded per se
- 19 rules compel that same result here. The Dr. Miles rule
- 20 conflicts with this Court's modern antitrust
- 21 jurisprudence in three fatal respects --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Maybe I'll put my question,
- 23 which is really just one through this. I understand
- 24 perfectly well that per se rules are a result of
- 25 balancing different things. Of course, resale price

- 1 maintenance does raise prices, and it is very often
- 2 anticompetitive. Of course, sometimes, there are good
- 3 reasons for it that might help consumers.
- 4 Now, in addition, you need clear rules. Now
- 5 those three sets of things require a balance. And we
- 6 have a hundred years of history where this Court and
- 7 Congress and others have balanced those three sets of
- 8 considerations, and they've come out one way. Now, the
- 9 Department of Justice wants to rebalance them and come
- 10 out the other way.
- 11 There are good arguments on both sides. Why
- 12 should we overrule a case that's 96 years old, in the
- 13 absence of any -- any -- congressional indication that
- 14 that's a good idea, when it's simply a question in a
- 15 difficult area of people reaching a slightly different
- 16 weight on some these three sets of things?
- 17 MR. HUNGAR: Several reasons, Your Honor.
- 18 It's not -- it's not a close question whether this Court
- 19 under its modern antitrust jurisprudence as an initial
- 20 matter would impose a per se rule in this context.
- 21 There is economic -- there is consensus among the
- 22 respected economists --
- JUSTICE BREYER: I would think it is quite a
- 24 close question.
- 25 MR. HUNGAR: I don't think so, Your Honor.

- 1 Given --
- JUSTICE BREYER: All right, so go ahead.
- 3 MR. HUNGAR: Given that this Court's test,
- 4 the question this Court's modern cases ask, in
- 5 distinguishing between the rule of reason and the per se
- 6 rule, is whether the challenged conduct is always or
- 7 almost always anticompetitive. That's what the Court
- 8 has said.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: Price fixing, horizontal, I
- 10 quess, or territorial divisions, we should overturn
- 11 those too.
- 12 MR. HUNGAR: Certainly not, Your Honor,
- 13 because that conduct is almost always anticompetitive in
- 14 our experience and in the experience of the courts. But
- 15 the same is not true in the resale price maintenance
- 16 context. Dr. Miles has foreclosed the courts from
- 17 conducting the kind of analysis that would actually look
- 18 into this question. But the empirical data that are
- 19 available suggest that anticompetitive
- 20 explanations for resale price maintenance do not have
- 21 very much explanatory power. When you actually look at
- 22 the cases that have been litigated, they involve
- 23 manufacturers without market power, unconcentrated
- 24 markets, no evidence in the vast majority of those cases
- 25 of any cartelization going on. So the anticompetitive

- 1 explanations, while certainly valid in some cases, do
- 2 not appear to explain most of the resale price
- 3 maintenance that has been litigated. It's true that
- 4 resale price maintenance can, but does not always, result
- 5 in price increases, but, as Justice Scalia pointed out,
- 6 price is not the only thing that consumers care about.
- 7 And there is widespread consensus in the economic
- 8 literature and in this Court's recent cases that
- 9 price-based vertical restraints, just like non-priced
- 10 vertical restraints, while they generally reduce
- intrabrand competition, generally enhance interbrand
- 12 competition.
- In Monsanto and Business Electronics,
- 14 this Court made clear that price vertical restraints,
- 15 like minimum resale price maintenance, frequently, in
- 16 fact usually, have the same or similar effects to the
- 17 non-price vertical restraints to which this Court now
- 18 applies rule of reason analysis. So the reason in
- 19 answer to your questions to --
- JUSTICE STEVENS: Wouldn't your argument
- 21 also apply to a conspiracy among the New York dealers in
- 22 this product just to fix price there? Because there's
- 23 plenty of interbrand competition, I think. I don't
- 24 think you can say it's absolutely clear that that would
- 25 always be anticompetitive because they would also agree

- 1 to provide additional services.
- MR. HUNGAR: No, Your Honor, because
- 3 horizontal -- the important thing to keep in mind is
- 4 that the incentives of the manufacturer when the
- 5 manufacturer --
- 6 JUSTICE STEVENS: No, I'm just talking about
- 7 a case in which it's the dealers who want to agree to
- 8 provide extra services at higher prices as their method
- 9 of better serving the public and they all agree that
- 10 they have to be conscious about the competition from
- 11 other brands. Why can we be absolutely certain that's
- 12 always going to be harmful to the consumer?
- MR. HUNGAR: Your Honor, the reason why we
- 14 know that is always or almost always harmful is that the
- 15 incentives at a horizontal level of a retailer cartel,
- 16 just like the incentives of the participants in a
- 17 manufacturing cartel --
- 18 JUSTICE STEVENS: They might be precisely
- 19 the same as the manufacturers: We think we'll make
- 20 more -- all make more money if we concentrate on service
- 21 rather than price.
- 22 MR. HUNGAR: No, Your Honor, because the
- 23 manufacturer's incentive is not to increase the profits
- of the retailers, but the retailers when they get
- 25 together obviously have a very different incentive,

- 1 which is not to benefit the manufacturer.
- JUSTICE BREYER: What you say is right.
- 3 What you say there is right. I feel I'm back in 1966.
- 4 The argument against that is we don't know which way
- 5 the push comes. The large retailers, Home Depot,
- 6 whatever they are, huge retailers, they want -- or maybe
- 7 it isn't the discounters, it's some other ones. We
- 8 don't know which way. You're throwing it into court.
- 9 You're throwing it before 12 people who may or may not
- 10 work this thing out. So the argument against what
- 11 you're saying is not logic. It's empirical and
- 12 administrative.
- MR. HUNGAR: Your Honor --
- 14 JUSTICE BREYER: That's what it was. That's
- 15 what it is now, I guess.
- 16 MR. HUNGAR: Your Honor, in State Oil the
- 17 same argument was made. The argument was made that,
- 18 while we don't have compelling empirical evidence that
- 19 Albrecht results in harm to the economy, we don't have
- 20 compelling empirical evidence that resale price
- 21 maintenance, maximum resale price maintenance, is
- 22 generally procompetitive, and in the absence of such
- 23 empirical evidence there's no basis for overturning
- 24 precedent. This Court unanimously --
- JUSTICE SOUTER: We do have empirical

- 1 evidence, though, don't we, that the decision of this
- 2 case is going to be very significant in the sort of
- 3 battle between Wal-Mart and the Main Street stores; and
- 4 why should this Court in effect take a shot in the dark
- 5 at resolving that, as distinct from leaving it to
- 6 Congress, which is in a position to know more about
- 7 where the shot is going to land than we are?
- 8 MR. HUNGAR: This Court -- I'm sorry.
- 9 There's no empirical evidence that I'm aware of about
- 10 what impact eliminating Dr. Miles would have on the
- 11 Wal-Marts of the world.
- 12 JUSTICE SOUTER: That's my point. But it
- 13 seems to me that there is a body of some empirical
- 14 evidence that the success of the Wal-Marts and the
- 15 Targets and the Home Depots was a success which was
- 16 correlated with the elimination of price maintenance by
- 17 the States.
- 18 MR. HUNGAR: I don't think so, Your Honor.
- 19 In fact, as Mr. Olson pointed out, the K-Marts of the
- 20 world began during the fair trade era.
- 21 JUSTICE SOUTER: They began, but they have
- 22 flourished in the post-fair trade era.
- MR. HUNGAR: Yes, Your Honor, but I think
- 24 considerations like the opening up of international
- 25 trade and the development of markets like China to

- 1 supply low-cost goods have a lot more to do with the
- 2 success of the Wal-Marts of the world than a rule like
- 3 Dr. Miles.
- 4 Remember, it's perfectly legal under current
- 5 law for manufacturers to impose the same sort of
- 6 constraints as long as they do it by fiat and unilateral
- 7 enforcement rather than by agreement. So the suggestion
- 8 that somehow this is going to revolutionize the economy
- 9 if Dr. Miles is overruled is simply unsupportable.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well then, what's
- 11 the great benefit in changing the rule if it's
- 12 perfectly legal to achieve the same result already?
- 13 MR. HUNGAR: As the Ping amicus brief -- the
- 14 Ping Golf Club Manufacturer amicus brief -- indicates
- 15 it's extremely expensive and inefficient to follow the
- 16 Colgate regime, that for those manufacturers for whom
- 17 resale price maintenance would be in effect a strategy
- 18 like Leegin, it's much more efficient to do it in many
- 19 circumstances by agreement, rather than the disruption
- 20 that is entailed when you terminate a dealer without
- 21 further discussion for discounting one item in order to
- 22 keep your policy in place.
- 23 JUSTICE SOUTER: But doesn't that answer
- 24 your argument that there isn't reason to believe that
- 25 there is going to be disruption if Dr. Miles goes,

- 1 because now it's going to be easy?
- 2 MR. HUNGAR: Your Honor, in 1945 during the
- 3 height of the fair trade era the FTC did a study which
- 4 concluded that only about 5 percent of the economy was
- 5 affected by fair trade. And the fair trade regime,
- 6 remember, is a different and more extreme regime. There
- 7 it was per se legality, not rule of reason. So it's
- 8 just -- there's just no basis for these assertions that
- 9 somehow the economy is going to be massively changed.
- 10 But it is also perfectly clear and undisputed that there
- 11 are circumstances in which it is more efficient for a
- 12 manufacturer to adopt resale price maintenance. It will
- 13 enhance its ability to compete and it will provide
- 14 consumers more of what they want, and that is a good
- 15 thing and the antitrust laws should not automatically
- 16 foreclose that merely because in a small percentage of
- 17 cases it is conceivable that there can be
- 18 anticompetitive effects.
- 19 JUSTICE SOUTER: Isn't it fair to say that
- 20 there is reason to believe that there may be a massive
- 21 reorientation in the retail economy if Dr. Miles goes?
- 22 And that gets to my problem, why should we be the people
- 23 to make a guess as opposed to the Congress as the
- 24 institution to make the guess?
- MR. HUNGAR: I'm not aware of any reason to

- 1 believe that, Your Honor, based on the historical record
- 2 and based on the modern realities. The Wal-Marts of the
- 3 world have succeeded because of their discounting
- 4 strategy. That's not going to change, and manufacturers
- 5 have an incentive to have their goods sold through those
- 6 stores, so that's not going to change either in the vast
- 7 majority of cases. And with respect --
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: If the rule of reason is
- 9 the one that applies, I gathered, perhaps incorrectly,
- 10 from Mr. Olson's remarks that this would be -- this case
- 11 would be thrown out on summary judgment, it would never
- 12 get to trial. How do you think the rule of reason would
- 13 operate if it were the rubric under which this case were
- 14 to be decided?
- 15 MR. HUNGAR: Your Honor, I think it would
- 16 operate as it does usually, which is the plaintiff would
- 17 be required to establish an anticompetitive effect
- 18 resulting from the challenged conduct, and once that
- 19 burden is overcome the defendant would be required to
- 20 come up with some legitimate business justification,
- 21 some procompetitive results that outweigh that. And
- 22 only if they could do that would they succeed.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, that's the formula,
- 24 but I take it from what you said and Mr. Olson said that
- 25 the plaintiff could never get across the first

- 1 threshold?
- MR. HUNGAR: We don't agree with that, Your
- 3 Honor. In cases where resale price maintenance is being
- 4 used to facilitate cartelization, either at the
- 5 manufacturer or the retail level, the plaintiff could
- 6 prevail. Also in, for example, in an oligopolistic
- 7 market.
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But in this case, this
- 9 case has none of those features.
- 10 MR. HUNGAR: Well, right.
- 11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: This case loses under the
- 12 rule of reason, right?
- 13 MR. HUNGAR: We don't know that. It seems
- 14 likely to assume that, though, and that's not a bad
- 15 thing. Leegin is obviously not dominant in the market.
- 16 It's obviously not going to succeed unless what it is
- 17 offering at a higher price is what consumers want, and
- 18 that is a good thing under the antitrust laws.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 20 Mr. Hungar.
- MR. HUNGAR: Thank you.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Coykendall.
- ORAL ARGUMENT OF ROBERT W. COYKENDALL
- 24 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- 25 MR. COYKENDALL: Thank you, Mr. Chief

- 1 Justice, and may it please the Court:
- 2 As recently as last month, this Court
- 3 restated a guiding principle of antitrust jurisprudence:
- 4 Discouraging price cuts and depriving consumers of low
- 5 prices is bad antitrust policy. RPM prohibits price --
- 6 JUSTICE SCALIA: Is that right? I mean, you
- 7 really think that antitrust policy means when -- any
- 8 arrangement that produce a higher price is bad?
- 9 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, we aren't talking
- 10 about any arrangement --
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: I mean, a lot of consumers
- 12 want, you know, extended warranties. They want show
- 13 rooms where they can go and look at things. All of
- 14 which costs more money. And where you cannot have
- 15 resale price maintenance the customers -- or you have
- 16 the free-rider problem. The customers shop at the place
- 17 that has the big show room, it looks at all the product
- 18 there, and then goes and buys it from somebody else who
- 19 has not incurred that expense.
- Now, I just don't think that all that
- 21 customers want is cheap. I think they want other things
- 22 besides cheap. I think they want service. I think they
- 23 want selection. I think they want the ability to view
- 24 goods and so forth. Why do you discount all of those
- 25 values?

- 1 MR. COYKENDALL: I don't discount all those
- 2 things. All those things are available under our
- 3 current regime where we have a per se prohibition
- 4 against resale price maintenance.
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, they aren't
- 6 available. This company thought that it could provide
- 7 higher service if it could assure its retailers that
- 8 they would not be undercut by people who are not
- 9 providing that kind of service.
- 10 MR. COYKENDALL: And there's no question
- 11 that even the plaintiff in this case was providing that
- 12 service. He was providing it more efficiently and he
- 13 just wanted to pass those efficiencies on.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: I don't, I don't know that
- 15 there's no question about that. There's certainly no
- 16 question that this company was successful in breaking
- into a difficult market with its strategy of assuring
- 18 its retailers a cushion so that they could provide the
- 19 service.
- 20 MR. COYKENDALL: The record shows that with
- 21 this specific company, most of the growth of its sales
- 22 occurred before it established a resale price
- 23 maintenance policy. So there are no demonstrated
- 24 benefits from this company of imposing and enforcing a
- 25 resale price maintenance policy.

- 1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What is your main
- 2 objection to -- I mean, it's hard to oppose a rule of
- 3 reason. Why, why can't the rule of reason work to
- 4 promote the objectives you've just articulated?
- 5 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, as a practical matter
- 6 for someone in my position -- or plaintiff's position --
- 7 it's impossible for a small dealer to muster the
- 8 resources in order to put forth --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: For a small dealer.
- 10 But as we've already heard, the dealers who engage in the
- 11 discount policy are places like Target and Wal-Mart.
- 12 Those aren't small dealers. Those are behemoths in the
- 13 retailing industry.
- MR. COYKENDALL: I would suggest that those
- 15 are not the people that really are being protected by
- 16 this particular per se prohibition. It is the small
- 17 mom-and-pop operation like my client that wants to
- 18 innovate and expand and pass on efficiencies and compete
- 19 with the big discounters who might have power of their
- 20 own in order to secure discounts.
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: So you don't agree with the
- 22 argument that we've heard this morning that the
- 23 transformation of American retailing since the 1970s and
- 24 the rise of the large-scale low-price retailers has
- 25 anything to do with the end of the fair trade laws and

- 1 that overruling Dr. Miles would reverse that?
- 2 MR. COYKENDALL: No, I absolutely agree with
- 3 that. But it's resale price maintenance that enables
- 4 these initiators, these small companies, these small
- 5 operations, to grow and innovate, achieve the
- 6 efficiencies, and pass those on, attract customers by
- 7 reducing prices. And all that is stopped by imposition
- 8 of a resale price maintenance.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: Is there anything to suggest
- 10 that the large-scale low-price retailers who were
- 11 supposedly dependent on Dr. Miles are -- support its
- 12 retention? Have they filed amicus briefs here or
- 13 otherwise suggested that this is essential to their
- 14 continuing operation?
- 15 MR. COYKENDALL: Again, the large-scale
- 16 dominant players in the retail industry have their own
- 17 market power. They don't need the protection of the
- 18 per se rule in order to enforce them. It's the next
- 19 generation that this rule really aims to protect.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: I don't understand that. I
- 21 mean, if it was really the case that they were going to
- 22 be losing, losing profits, I think they would have been
- 23 here. I mean, we talk about the Wal-Marts and the
- 24 Targets. They're not here on amicus briefs because
- 25 they're -- what they're selling is cheap. They are

- 1 selling price, and people who want low price and for
- 2 whom that's of value above all other things are going to
- 3 continue to go to those stores. So they're not going to
- 4 be harmed by the fact that some manufacturers want to
- 5 provide not just the low price -- of course, they'll try
- 6 to keep the price as low as possible -- but service.
- 7 I just don't see what, what harm can
- 8 possibly come, so long as there's no market dominance,
- 9 from allowing some people to make their money on service
- 10 and -- rather than cheap price.
- 11 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, again I would suggest
- 12 that under this current system the way it is we have
- 13 both the full-service providers of complete service that
- offer goods at a certain price and we have discounters
- 15 selling those same goods. There is currently a mix of
- 16 service and price that better serves the economy than
- just having one cookie cutter -- a one-size-fits-all
- 18 approach that you would have with resale price
- 19 maintenance.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, I thought the per se
- 21 rule was the cookie cutter approach.
- 22 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, in terms of
- 23 prohibiting price or in terms of, yes, prohibiting price
- 24 fixing, that's true. But it permits stores to have full
- 25 price and full service and charge high prices for that

- 1 service, and it permits discounters to reduce price,
- 2 reduce service and cater to those customers who want the
- 3 goods with lower service.
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: The Internet -- is it --
- 5 you would have said four years ago, or I think we are in
- 6 this argument, you would have said -- it's the large
- 7 discounters, the growing discounters, the Walgreens' of
- 8 the world who want to get rid of resale price
- 9 maintenance, it's there to help the mom and pops. Okay.
- 10 They're in now, they're big, and they may want to
- 11 maintain resale prices because they may want to extract
- 12 the extra profit, while the Internet little company
- 13 comes in and says I can get it to you cheaper.
- Now I can imagine circumstances like you
- 15 say. I can imagine they're not like you say. I don't
- 16 know. And so what should I do if I really don't know?
- 17 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, there is no doubt
- 18 that resale price maintenance raises prices to
- 19 consumers. The only economic doubt is whether there are
- 20 any redeeming effects of those prices; and that's where
- 21 the economic dispute of this is.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I thought the
- 23 Ping brief that was referenced earlier made a point that
- 24 it made, the prices may be -- resale price -- the
- 25 current Dr. Miles rule may result in increased prices

- 1 because of the inefficiencies for those retailers, or of
- 2 those manufacturers who want to establish a regime where
- 3 something other than price is important, and they have
- 4 to do that unilaterally, which increases inefficiencies.
- 5 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, Your Honor, I would
- 6 suggest that, first of all, eliminating the per se rule
- 7 would not decrease the inefficiencies of the Colgate
- 8 doctrine. If they want to impose resale price
- 9 maintenance in order to avoid even a rule of reason
- 10 approach, they would have to go through --
- 11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Even with the tremendous
- 12 anomaly that the employer -- that the -- the
- 13 manufacturer cannot do this by agreement, but he can do
- 14 it just as a matter -- just unilaterally and terminate
- 15 any dealer that won't go along? Those two sit
- 16 uncomfortably with each other. Colgate seems to say you
- 17 can achieve the same end but we're not going to let you
- 18 do it by agreement, you have to do it on your own, and
- 19 then you have to do the draconian thing of terminating
- 20 the dealer.
- 21 MR. COYKENDALL: I believe that anomaly
- 22 really lies at the heart of the Sherman Antitrust Act
- 23 which is aimed at contracts, combinations and
- 24 conspiracies. Unilateral conduct isn't reached by that,
- 25 it's the price of being in a fair country. People can

- 1 deal in ways that they want to with this particular
- 2 issue.
- But again, eliminating the per se rule will
- 4 not help Ping out if they want to maintain their resale
- 5 price maintenance as legal, as unilateral. They'll
- 6 still have to go through these same machinations.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why is that? Why
- 8 can't -- eliminating the rule, I thought the whole point
- 9 was they would just put in their contracts, you have to
- 10 sell it at this price, and they could enforce the
- 11 contracts, rather than having to have these machinations
- 12 of making sure they don't do anything that looks like an
- 13 agreement with their retailers?
- MR. COYKENDALL: Well, again, then they
- 15 would be subject to a rule of reason analysis and the
- 16 uncertainties occasioned with that as to whether this
- 17 contract is lawful. If they want to avoid that, then of
- 18 course, they would have to stick with the Colgate
- 19 doctrine.
- 20 Your Honor, in this particular case we have
- 21 clear evidence that RPM was used to facilitate a
- 22 horizontal retailer cartel. We have evidence -- as is
- 23 shown in the briefs -- that Leegin would gather its
- 24 dealers in a dealer meeting, discuss the policy, agree
- 25 to changes, and reach a consensus, and then enforce that

- 1 policy against everyone.
- 2 One of the evils of resale price maintenance
- 3 is specifically this: It does facilitate the formation
- 4 of cartels.
- 5 JUSTICE STEVENS: Yes, but the conspiracy
- 6 that it facilitated is just with intrabrand
- 7 competition. There wasn't any conspiracy that affected
- 8 interbrand competition.
- 9 MR. COYKENDALL: Retail --
- 10 JUSTICE STEVENS: So I'm not sure that
- 11 economically it makes any difference whether the dealers
- 12 are the one who decide to do it or the manufacturer was,
- 13 or they all did it at the same time.
- 14 MR. COYKENDALL: Horizontal conspiracies,
- 15 even among a single brand, has always been a per se
- 16 violation of the antitrust law. You can look back at
- 17 the --
- 18 JUSTICE STEVENS: No, but if we say the rule
- 19 of reason should apply to all cases that just affect
- 20 intrabrand competition, I'm not sure why we should keep
- 21 this outmoded rule about horizontal conspiracies that
- 22 only affect intrabrand competition.
- MR. COYKENDALL: There you're striking
- 24 really at the heart of the -- the heart of the Sherman
- 25 Act, et al., holding that horizontal conspiracies, which

- 1 nobody believes promote competition, could be justified
- 2 under the same thinking.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: No, but it's a totally -- I
- 4 cannot imagine why a horizontal conspiracy among dealers
- 5 could ever produce consumer welfare. It will be a
- 6 horizontal conspiracy to get more money out of the
- 7 consumer; but whereas the manufacturer who wants to
- 8 impose resale price maintenance, his interest isn't to
- 9 give the retailer as much -- more money than the
- 10 retailer is now making. He's going to try to keep their
- 11 margin just as low as it ever was, so that he can sell
- 12 as many of his products as possible consistent with his
- desire to sell his product by attaching to it more
- 14 service, better warranty, more showrooms, whatever.
- I mean, a horizontal conspiracy, the
- 16 incentives are entirely different. When you're dealing
- 17 with a manufacturer, it seems to me his incentive is
- 18 still to keep the price as low as possible, consistent
- 19 with the additional good that he wants to give consumers
- 20 to attract those consumers to his product.
- 21 MR. COYKENDALL: In this particular case
- 22 there is a complete alignment of incentives, because the
- 23 manufacturer was also a retailer competing in this
- 24 market. He has the incentive to increase retailer
- 25 profits.

- JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, if that's the case
- 2 and if that makes a difference, the rule of reason would
- 3 allow you to make that argument. But you -- but you
- 4 want to say it's bad across the board for everybody. If
- 5 indeed there's something peculiar about this case, the
- 6 rule of reason would allow you to argue that.
- 7 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, Your Honor, we would
- 8 suggest that the horizontal conspiracy between Leegin as
- 9 a retailer and the other retailers offering its products
- 10 is more than just a rule of reason approach. That would
- 11 be per se illegal under this Court's precedents.
- 12 Retail price maintenance also has the
- 13 problem we discussed earlier of perpetuating incumbent
- 14 forms of distribution at the expense of the innovative
- 15 and more efficient distribution means. Retailers, in
- 16 retail competition matters, retailers should be entitled
- 17 to innovate, pass efficiencies along to customers in the
- 18 form of lower prices, attract new customers, and grow in
- 19 that manner.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Coykendall, the -- on
- 21 the question -- you alleged in the complaint that there
- 22 was some discounting allowed by, how do you pronounce
- 23 it, Leegin?
- MR. COYKENDALL: Leegin.
- 25 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Leegin. And Mr. Olson

- 1 said that that wasn't pursued at trial; is that correct?
- 2 MR. COYKENDALL: That particular aspect was
- 3 referred to; it wasn't pursued as a separate part of
- 4 this. Prior to trial, the judge did rule that the
- 5 Dr. Miles line of cases applied and the conduct would be
- 6 judged under per se rule. So certain aspects with
- 7 respect to the horizontal conspiracy and the differences
- 8 in discounts -- I mean, developed that much.
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Suppose you were to lose,
- 10 you would still have that claim, I take it?
- 11 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, yes. We would
- 12 suggest the record is sufficient that, on remand, the
- instruction given the jury as to the standard by which
- 14 their conduct could be judged could be sustained as a
- 15 per se violation under the rules related to horizontal
- 16 conspiracies as well. And again, I would suggest that
- 17 perhaps if the Court doesn't reach that, it should
- 18 remand to the Fifth Circuit for them to consider whether
- 19 that is a possibility.
- 20 Resale price maintenance can distort
- 21 consumer choice. The retailers -- so the person comes
- 22 into the store -- the retailers can exercise pressure to
- 23 influence the selection of higher margin products over
- 24 ones that may better fit the consumer needs. That is an
- 25 evil of resale price maintenance, whether or not it does

- 1 promote efficiencies.
- 2 And if resale price maintenance does act as
- 3 it is theorized, to increase retailer services, some
- 4 consumers will be worse off, they'll be paying for
- 5 services they don't want.
- There are alternatives to RPM.
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: I don't suppose there's any
- 8 -- I don't suppose there's any way to protect against
- 9 the fallout to the consumer, is there? I mean if
- 10 indeed, if indeed a store presses on a consumer a
- 11 product that's more expensive than what he needs or --
- 12 and what he wants, is this a real argument against this,
- 13 that there's some stupid consumers whose can be conned?
- 14 I mean, whatever rule we adopt, that's going to be the
- 15 situation.
- 16 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, if -- what you're
- 17 doing is you're building in this high margin that gives
- 18 the retailer an incentive to do that. If there is no
- 19 resale price maintenance so that margin isn't
- 20 guaranteed, the incentive disappears. What is clear is
- 21 that retail -- resale price maintenance is a blunt
- 22 instrument to achieve any economies.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: You're assuming that the --
- 24 that the retailer has a higher margin on the resale
- 25 price good. Why do you assume that?

- 1 MR. COYKENDALL: That's the only incentive,
- 2 the only reason for imposing resale price maintenance.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: He's only going to be given
- 4 the thing if he does the kind of additional service that
- 5 the manufacturer wants. That's the whole purpose of it.
- 6 And the manufacturer is going to try to keep his margin
- 7 just as low as he can consistent with the -- you know --
- 8 consistent with selling as many products as he can.
- 9 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, there are more
- 10 efficient ways than RPM to achieve any benefits of
- 11 efficiency, such as contracts with the retailers to
- 12 provide those additional demand creating services. He
- 13 could pay the retailers to provide those services. He
- 14 could provide those services directly, and I would
- 15 suggest --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why would you argue
- 17 that those are more efficient than resale price
- 18 maintenance?
- MR. COYKENDALL: Resale price
- 20 maintenance amounts to nothing more than throwing money
- 21 at the problem. You're guaranteeing a margin and you're
- 22 hoping that it's going to be used somehow for the
- 23 consumer's benefit, and you've got no guarantee that any
- 24 dealer is going to use the margin that they're
- 25 guaranteed in any way to service the consumers.

- 1 And I would suggest that in geographically
- 2 isolated areas --
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, you can add
- 4 the contractual provisions you were talking about to a
- 5 contract that has a minimum resale price. The minimum
- 6 resale price is to take away the incentive from the
- 7 retailer not to carry through on the non-price aspects.
- 8 MR. COYKENDALL: If you have a contract
- 9 requiring those services, you don't need the minimum
- 10 resale price. That's just completely unnecessary. And
- 11 that would prohibit an efficient dealer from passing on
- 12 those efficiencies to its consumers.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Does that presume a
- 14 contract in which the retailer has a separate charge for
- 15 the service?
- 16 MR. COYKENDALL: It could be. It may not.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Because if not, I don't see
- 18 how that would work -- under your rule.
- 19 MR. COYKENDALL: Well, under -- the idea is
- 20 the manufacturer chooses to deal with only those dealers
- 21 that offer this particular service. They sign a
- 22 contract to provide that service. If they don't want to
- 23 provide that service, they don't sign the contract,
- 24 they don't get the goods. It's as simple as that.
- 25 If the question is providing a larger margin

- 1 to the dealer, the most efficient way is for the
- 2 manufacturer simply to lower their wholesale price, and
- 3 the margin the dealer receives is higher.
- 4 Again, if there are other efficiencies, they
- 5 might be achieved by exclusive territories as permitted
- 6 by Sylvania or by the Colgate doctrine.
- 7 I would suggest the experience of the 30
- 8 years following the elimination of the fair trade laws
- 9 have shown the wisdom of the Dr. Miles decision which
- 10 places faith in the free market system. This Court
- 11 should continue to honor its precedents and respect the
- 12 will of Congress by adhering to the Dr. Miles rule.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Your reference to
- 14 the will of Congress, they haven't enacted legislation
- 15 that supports the result you seek.
- 16 MR. COYKENDALL: Your Honor, as this Court
- 17 observed in Sylvania, Congress by repealing the
- 18 Miller-Tydings McGuire Act did indicate its support for
- 19 the per se rule. I believe the Court should adhere to
- 20 that holding as well.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- Ms. Underwood.
- ORAL ARGUMENT OF BARBARA D. UNDERWOOD
- 24 ON BEHALF OF NEW YORK AS AMICUS CURIAE
- 25 SUPPORTING THE RESPONDENT

- 1 MS. UNDERWOOD: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
- 2 it please the Court:
- When a manufacturer agrees with its
- 4 retailers to fix a minimum resale price, the whole point
- 5 of the agreement is to prevent price competition among
- 6 retailers, to prevent discounting. For almost 100 years
- 7 the Court has interpreted section 1 of the Sherman Act
- 8 to prohibit such price-fixing agreements. Any change in
- 9 that fundamental understanding of the statute should be
- 10 made by Congress and not by this Court.
- 11 The per se rule against resale price
- 12 maintenance is different in at least three ways from
- 13 other antitrust rules that this Court has overturned.
- 14 First, unlike the other rules, it alone has been settled
- 15 law for a century, reaffirmed over and over again by
- 16 this Court.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, it's also been
- 18 settled law for 90 years under the Colgate doctrine that
- 19 manufacturers can achieve the same results, albeit more
- 20 inefficiently. Doesn't it make sense to allow them to
- 21 adopt the most efficient means to an end that is already
- 22 completely legal?
- MS. UNDERWOOD: No. That tension that you
- 24 -- that supposed anomaly that you describe is simply a
- 25 result of the fact that the antitrust rule -- law does

- 1 not prohibit all anticompetitive behavior. It prohibits
- 2 agreements that are anti -- that restrain competition.
- And so it will often be the case that it is
- 4 possible for somebody unilaterally to do something that
- 5 has the same effect as an agreement, or approximately
- 6 the same effect, as the antitrust law simply draws that
- 7 line because of a different value, a value in preserving
- 8 the independent action of individuals.
- 9 It is, however --
- 10 JUSTICE SCALIA: I'm not sure it's often the
- 11 case. Give me some other examples where you can achieve
- 12 the same industry-wide effect unilaterally.
- MS. UNDERWOOD: Well, as you have observed,
- 14 virtually any vertical restriction could be accomplished
- 15 by having the manufacturer integrate the retailing
- 16 function and become one entity instead of two entities.
- 17 Then the possibility of conspiracy or agreement is
- 18 eliminated and the manufacturer, if he simply integrates
- 19 the whole function, is -- can fix prices, fix his, what
- 20 are in effect his own prices and be outside the reach of
- 21 the antitrust laws. There are other reasons why a
- 22 manufacturer might not find it convenient to do that
- 23 integration, but it is certainly possible by ceasing to
- 24 be multiple entities and to become one entity to avoid
- 25 the prohibitions of the antitrust law.

- 1 It is also -- so, this is old and well
- 2 settled. Unlike the Schwinn rule against territorial
- 3 restraints which was overturned only 10 years after it
- 4 was established, or the Albrecht rule against maximum
- 5 resale price maintenance which was overturned 29 years
- 6 after it was established, this has a much more settled
- 7 pedigree in the law and expectations have grown up
- 8 around it.
- 9 Second, it was endorsed and relied on by
- 10 Congress, not enacted by Congress but endorsed and
- 11 relied on by Congress, when Congress repealed the fair
- 12 trade laws in 1975 by amending the very statute this
- 13 Court is now asked to interpret.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Were they relying on
- 15 Dr. Miles or were they relying on us? That's the
- 16 question.
- MS. UNDERWOOD: They were relying --
- 18 JUSTICE SCALIA: They left the situation
- 19 where it was, which is that the antitrust law is as
- 20 determined by this Court, and we had shown our
- 21 willingness to update the antitrust law when sound
- 22 economic doctrine suggests is necessary.
- MS. UNDERWOOD: No. The legislative history
- 24 described in some detail in the Antitrust Institute's
- 25 brief shows that actually they were returning the law to

- 1 the per se rule against resale price maintenance, that
- 2 they thought resale price maintenance was bad and should
- 3 be prohibited.
- 4 This is -- it is also true that --
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But of course, they
- 6 could always pass a law saying that if their intent is
- 7 so clear. They didn't do that here.
- 8 MS. UNDERWOOD: That's true, they did not do
- 9 that here and I'm not suggesting that they did, only
- 10 that, uniquely among the rules that this Court has
- 11 established in the antitrust area, this rule has
- 12 received the repeated attention of Congress; and so the
- 13 Court's deference to Congress and reluctance to overturn
- 14 the rule should be at its peak as compared with those
- 15 other rules.
- 16 And third, price is different. This Court
- 17 has said that price competition is the central nervous
- 18 system of the economy. Other restraints, to be sure,
- 19 might indirectly affect price, but not with the same
- 20 absolute force. Territorial restraints don't absolutely
- 21 prevent price competition because customers can travel
- 22 or order by phone, mail, or Internet, and indeed under
- 23 territorial restraints there are often multiple
- 24 retailers in a particular territory who can compete.
- 25 Maximum price maintenance doesn't prevent price

- 1 competition at all unless, as the Court noted in Khan,
- 2 it's really minimum resale price maintenance in disguise,
- 3 in which case the Court in Khan said it's illegal.
- 4 Manufacturers can of course pay retailers
- 5 for the services that enhance the product that are being
- 6 advanced as the procompetition benefit of resale price
- 7 maintenance. But the question for this Court is whether
- 8 the manufacturer should be allowed to use a price-fixing
- 9 agreement to make that payment to buy those services,
- 10 and that's not a question of fact for a jury to decide
- in a rule of reason trial. That's a question of
- 12 statutory interpretation for this Court. It's a
- 13 question really of what kind of currency a manufacturer
- 14 can use to buy those retailer services.
- 15 It's also true that the claim that
- 16 price fixing works to induce those services is both
- 17 debatable and untested. The retailers have no
- 18 obligations to provide services under the retail price
- 19 maintenance agreement at issue in this case and in other
- 20 cases.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But they could. I
- 22 mean, you could easily write the agreement saying you
- 23 have to charge this much and because you have to charge
- 24 this much you also have to provide the training, the
- 25 service, whatever the non-price inducements are.

- 1 MS. UNDERWOOD: You could. You could also
- 2 require those things without resale price maintenance
- 3 and then the retailer would be free to decide to raise
- 4 the price to pay for that or to provide it so
- 5 efficiently that he could in effect engage --
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But then the
- 7 retailer, but then the retailer might have a real
- 8 incentive not to do a good job on the service because
- 9 they really want to market it for price, not for
- 10 service.
- 11 MS. UNDERWOOD: That really depends, doesn't
- 12 it, on what the consumers in the market want, and if
- 13 it's correct, if the manufacturer -- if the claim on
- 14 behalf of the manufacturer here is correct that what the
- 15 customers want is service, the retailers are in at least
- 16 as good a position to identify that fact as not.
- I think the point --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but there you
- 19 have the free-rider problem, which is you go to the
- 20 fancy show room, you figure out what you want, and then
- 21 you buy it at the discount store.
- MS. UNDERWOOD: Yes. That's at its peak,
- 23 perhaps, when you're talking about electronics. When
- 24 the shopping experience alone is what is thought to be
- 25 the benefit, which is often the case, you can't free

- 1 ride on that. You either shop in the place where you
- 2 like to shop or you shop -- or you have a different
- 3 shopping experience in Target.
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: But some manufacturers want
- 5 their product associated with excellent service, high
- 6 warranty, and all of that. And there is no way to get
- 7 that uniformly for that product without this kind
- 8 of agreement.
- 9 MS. UNDERWOOD: Yes, there is. The
- 10 manufacturer can contract for it. The manufacturer can
- 11 decline to deal with people who don't provide it. The
- 12 very same point that was being made earlier.
- I think that the point here is that
- 14 permitting resale price maintenance would be such a
- 15 drastic change in the longstanding settled
- 16 interpretation of the Sherman Act that it doesn't really
- 17 qualify as the kind of common law evolution that this
- 18 Court has said is appropriate ordinarily in making
- 19 antitrust rules under the Sherman Act. If that change
- 20 is to be made at all, it should be made by Congress and
- 21 not by this Court.
- 22 JUSTICE STEVENS: Am I correct on the
- 23 congressional point that there was a period when
- 24 Congress would have prohibited the Solicitor General
- 25 from making the argument he made today?

- 1 MS. UNDERWOOD: Yes, there was such a
- 2 period. And this Court noted that fact in --
- JUSTICE STEVENS: So there was a legislative
- 4 expression of a position on this particular issue?
- 5 MS. UNDERWOOD: There was a legislative
- 6 expression of position on this particular issue.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And that no longer
- 8 is applicable?
- 9 MS. UNDERWOOD: That is -- the Solicitor
- 10 General is no longer barred from making that argument,
- 11 as is evident today. What he --
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: I guess Congress changed
- 13 its mind then.
- MS. UNDERWOOD: No, I think Congress found
- 15 it unnecessary or perhaps questioned the wisdom or
- 16 constitutionality of barring the Solicitor General from
- 17 making particular arguments.
- 18 JUSTICE SCALIA: I find it hard to believe
- 19 that.
- 20 (Laughter.)
- MS. UNDERWOOD: But Congress has
- 22 consistently -- well, and the repeal -- the reason the
- 23 repeal of the Miller-Tydings Act seems particularly
- 24 relevant is that it is indeed -- it was an amendment to
- 25 this statute that this Court is being asked to

- 1 interpret, so it sheds some light on the on the meaning
- 2 of this statute as it stands.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: As Mr. Olson pointed out,
- 4 under the fair trade laws this was per se legal. So
- 5 that's quite a different thing.
- 6 MS. UNDERWOOD: Yes. But when Congress
- 7 repealed that, there were considerable -- there was
- 8 considerable expression of legislative history, for
- 9 those who find legislative history helpful, that
- 10 declared opposition to resale price maintenance, not
- 11 simply that it was sometimes helpful and sometimes
- 12 hurtful. So to the extent Congress's intent can be
- 13 gleaned from that legislative history, it was an intent
- 14 to return to the regime of per se illegality.
- 15 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Maybe on the year by
- 16 year, don't spend any money on, maybe Congress decided
- 17 that wasn't an appropriate technique, but Congress has
- 18 used that after, hasn't it, in other cases?
- 19 MS. UNDERWOOD: It has, but I would question
- 20 the wisdom of that technique as a method of expressing
- 21 Congress's view. The fact that Congress went so far as
- 22 to use it once suggests a very strong view indeed.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 24 Ms. Underwood.
- Mr. Olson, you have 3 minutes remaining.

Official

1	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF THEODORE B. OLSON
2	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
3	MR. OLSON: The Respondent and its amici
4	seem to recognize that what this Court said in State Oil
5	versus Khan, that a vertical restraint imposed by a
6	single manufacturer or wholesaler may stimulate
7	interbrand competition even as it reduces intrabrand
8	competition and, by the way, it enhances intrabrand
9	competition on matters of service and availability and
LO	other things in addition to price. The Respondent and
L1	their amici seem to have acknowledged these
L2	procompetitive factors but say you should do it by a
L3	contract with 5,000 different retailers, which you then
L4	have to go out and enforce, or you have to do it under a
L5	Colgate system, which the Ping brief demonstrates it's a
L6	blunt instrument, it requires terminating retailers with
L7	which you have had a relationship for years, it prohibits
L8	even talking to the loyal retailers to fix small
L9	problems.
20	JUSTICE STEVENS: But you're just giving
21	them an additional ground for termination.
22	MR. OLSON: Pardon me?
23	JUSTICE STEVENS: You're just giving, you're
24	just suggesting we should give them an additional ground
25	for termination.

- 1 MR. OLSON: No. What we're suggesting is
- 2 that the agreement is something that -- the details can be
- 3 worked out. The manufacturer can -- and the Ping brief
- 4 explains this. The manufacturer can go to the retailer
- 5 and say: Look, maybe you didn't get it right, your
- 6 salesperson said the wrong thing; let's fix it, because
- 7 we want to be dealing together. The antitrust laws --
- 8 in other words, what the Respondent and its amici want --
- 9 or they suggest forward integration, so you just acquire
- 10 all your retailers.
- 11 The benefits of these type of arrangements
- 12 provide the consumers with choices. It stimulates
- interbrand competition. It promotes intrabrand
- 14 competition on things other than price. It provides
- 15 consumers with more choices. It ultimately gives more
- 16 freedom to the manufacturer to stimulate the sale of its
- 17 products, to enter the marketplace.
- 18 These are things that the Court has said,
- 19 and provides a more varied marketplace. The Court has
- 20 repeatedly said that the presumptive rule is a rule of
- 21 reason. Per se rules should be tossed out or not
- 22 adopted unless they're dealing with a practice which is
- 23 invariably anticompetitive. This practice, as
- 24 acknowledged, is procompetitive. It provides many
- 25 opportunities, and it is irrational for vertical

- 1 restrictions to exist in this world in the non-price
- 2 area or the maximum price area as subject to the rule of
- 3 reason and the minimum retail price maintenance under a
- 4 rigid per se rule that cannot be changed.
- 5 And as this Court has repeatedly held,
- 6 Congress intended by the use of restraint of trade and
- 7 the unreasonable restraint of trade for this court to
- 8 continue to breathe life into the restrictions of the
- 9 antitrust laws in the benefit of the consumer and in the
- 10 benefit of competition, eliminating rigid per se rules
- 11 which make it unlawful for a manufacturer to do
- 12 something that's rational in the marketplace, to give
- 13 consumer choices, or to do it in some indirect way that
- is a lawyer's dream and an entrepreneur's nightmare
- 15 makes no sense at all.
- 16 For all those reasons, the rule of reason in
- 17 this area, as in the other areas, should replace the
- 18 per se rule which is rigid and anticompetitive at the
- 19 end of the day.
- Thank you.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 22 Mr. Olson.
- The case is submitted.
- 24 (Whereupon, at 11:05 a.m., The case in the
- 25 above-entitled matter was submitted.)

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